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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 167684

FOLLOWING REPEAT PORT MORESBY 85 SENT SECSTATE INFO CANBERRA
JAKARTA WELLINGTON DATED JULY 29.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0085

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

1. THIS CABLE, HAND CARRIED TO CANBERRA FOR
TRANSMISSION, CONSTITUTES PORT MORESBY'S
ASSESSMENT OF RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

2. OVER PAST YEAR OR SO SOMARE CABINET HAS
HAD TO MAKE A LARGE NUMBER OF DECISIONS AS
NATURAL RESULT OF THE TRANSFER OF POWER TO
PNG. CERTAIN DECISIONS, INCLUDING SOME THAT
HAD TO BE TAKEN VERY QUICKLY, WERE NOT PRESENTED
TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY. BACK BENCHERS HAVE
BECOME RESTIVE, BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THE
CABINET WAS ASSUMING THEIR DECISION-MAKING
FUNCTIONS. SOME, PERHAPS MOST, OF THE BACK
BENCHERS TRIED TO GET INTO CABINET, AND FELT
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REBUFFED WHEN SOMARE WOULD NOT TAKE THEM IN.

3. DURING THIS PERIOD, THE CONSTITUTIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE, A MULTI-PARTY BODY, BECAME THE RALLYING POINT FOR DISCONTENT. SOMARE MAY HAVE BELIEVED THAT HE WAS INTEGRATING TWO DISSIDENTS INTO THE GOVERNMENT WHEN HE APPOINTED MOMIS AND KAPUTIN TO THE CPC. EVENTS HAVE PROVED HIM SADLY WRONG. SOMARE HIMSELF REPORTEDLY PAID LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CPC EVEN THOUGH HE IS CHAIRMAN, AND MOMIS AND KAPUTIN ASSERTED THEIR LEADERSHIP, RADICALIZING THE UNITED PARTY REPRESENTATIVES AS THEY DID SO. THE CPC TOOK ON MORE AUTHORITY THAN IT WAS INTENDED TO HAVE, AND, WHEN SOMARE BEGAN REFERRING CURRENT CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS TO THE CPC AS A ROUTINE MATTER, THIS WHETTED ITS APPETITE. MOMIS BECAME INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF SOMARE'S GOVERNMENT. HE STATED ON THE RADIO ON MAY 27 THAT THE PRESENT POWER STRUCTURE IN THE PNG GOVERNMENT WAS AN ABUSE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

4. SOMARE MAY HAVE BELIEVED HE HAD LOST CONTROL OF CPC, AND, IN ANY EVENT, HE TOOK HIS DIFFERENCES WITH THE CPC TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AT THE END OF JUNE WHEN HE PRESENTED A MINORITY REPORT SIGNED BY HIM AND DR. GUISE ALONG WITH THE MAJORITY REPORT.

5. THESE DEVELOPMENTS TOOK PLACE AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF WEAK POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, LACK OF PARTY DISCIPLINE, STRONG REGIONAL PULLS, PERSONAL AMBITIONS, AND A PERVERSIVE EGALITARIANISM WHICH HAMPERS THE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY. THE SITUATION HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE INCREASINGLY EVIDENT SHORTNESS OF SOMARE'S TEMPER. (HE LOOKED TIRED AND STRAINED WHEN I CALLED ON HIM ON JULY 16.)

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6. SOMARE APPEARS TO BE TRYING TO PLACATE MOMIS BUT IS MEETING KAPUTIN HEAD ON. KIKI TOLD ME JULY 23 THAT HE THOUGH SOMARE AND KAPUTIN WOULD WORK OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES, BUT EVENTS RELATED IN PORT MORESBY'S 68 BLIE HIS OPTIMISM. KAPUTIN HAS BEEN RELIEVED OF THE JUSTICE PORTFOLIO, AND SOMARE HAS SAID HE WOULD HAVE OUSTED KAPUTIN FROM THE CAINET IF

HE HAD THE AUTHORITY TO DO SO. HOWEVER, SOMARE, IN A CONCILIATION GESTURE, INDICATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO LET THE CONSTITUTION BE DECIDED BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, AND TO LET THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY APPROVE THE DATE OF INDEPENDENCE. MOMIS, ON HIS PART, INDICATED SOME FLEXIBILITY ON THE CONSTITUTION, AND THIS SUGGESTS COMPROMISE BETWEEN THEM.

7. ACCORDING TO TONY VOUTAS, HOWEVER, TWO ISSUES WILL BE VERY HARD TO RECONCILE: (1) THE TYPE OF CONSTITUTION AND (2) CITIZENSHIP. VOUTAS THINKS THESE ISSUES MAY HAVE TO BE SETTLED BY A VOTE IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, A VOTE WHICH VOUTAS BELIEVES COULD BRING ABOUT A REALIGNMENT OF PARTIES. THE CPC COULD BE THE CORE OF A NEW PARTY LED BY MOMIS AND KAPUTIN AND INCLUDING SOME RADICALIZED UNITED PARTY MEMBERS. A RECONSTITUTED PANGU JOINED BY VARIOUS NON-PANGU MEMBERS UNDER SOMARE WOULD BE THE OTHER GROUP. THE NEW PANGU WOULD BE TO THE RIGHT OF THE MOMIS GROUP. IT SEEMS TO BE GENERALLY AGREED AS OF LATE JULY THAT SOMARE HAS THE VOTES TO WIN THIS CONTEST.

8. ANOTHER ELEMENT WHICH SEEMS NOT TO HAVE SURFACED AS A MAJOR ISSUE BUT WHICH I BELIEVE MAY BE BASIC IS QUESTION OF THE POWER OF CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET VERSUS THE POWER OF HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AND DISTRICTS. CPC PROPOSALS WOULD TEND TO BUILD UP HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AND DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS (THE FIRST OF WHICH IS NOW BEING ESTABLISHED)
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AT THE EXPENSE OF CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET. THIS WILL BE VERY POPULAR IN HOUSE AND IN THE DISTRICTS. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET WOULD BE SO DILUTED AS TO HAMPER OR EVEN MAKE IMPOSSIBLE THE GOVERNING OF THE COUNTRY. SOMARE HAS PULLED INTO THE CHIEF MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT MUCH POWER (POLICE, DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CENTRAL PLANNING AND NOW, TEMPORARILY, JUSTICE), AND HE CANNOT BE INDIFFERENT TO AN EROSION OF HIS AUTHORITY. VOUTAS SAID THAT SOMARE IS CONCERNED THAT THE DISTRICT GOVERNMENTS WILL GET TOO MUCH POWER.

9. COMPROMISE AND CONSENSUS ARE THE NORMAL WAY OF LIFE IN PNG BUT AT PRESENT IT LOOKS LIKE A SHOWDOWN WHICH SOMARE CAN WIN, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT RUN. ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE CANNOT BE ASSESSED NOW. THE PRICE OF VICTORY COULD BE HIGH, OR, CONVERSELY, VICTORY COULD CLEARLY ESTABLISH SOMARE'S PRIMACY.

10. SOMARE IS SAID STILL TO WANT DECEMBER 1 AS THE DATE OF INDEPENDENCE, BUT HE HAS SPOKEN OF THE POSSIBILITY OF FEBRUARY AND OTHERS ARE MENTIONING MARCH OR APRIL. KIKI TOLD ME HE EXPECTS TO GO TO THE TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL

MEETING IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER. THE AUSTRALIANS HERE ARE EAGERLY HOPING FOR AS EARLY A DATE AS POSSIBLE. JOHN BENNETTS (AUSTRALIAN HICOMM) TOLD ME ALL PLANNING IS BEING DONE IN HICOMM ON THE ASSUMPTION INDEPENDENCE WILL BE ON DECEMBER 1.

1. AUSTRALIAN CORRESPONDENTS IN PORT MORESBY APPEAR TO BE TAKING A GLOOMY VIEW OF THE WHOLE SITUATION AND TO CONSIDER THE CRISIS OVER THE CONSTITUTION AS A MAJOR CONFIDENTIAL

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TURNING POINT IN PNG POLITICS. MY LIMITED EXPERIENCE HERE, HOWEVER, MAKES ME PLAY DOWN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECENT EVENTS. THE DRAFTING OF CONSTITUTION ALMOST INEVITABLY BRINGS ABOUT SERIOUS DIFFERENCES, AND A CONFRONTATION SHOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. THE DELAY IN INDEPENDENCE OF A FEW MONTHS COULD BE OF NO CONSEQUENCE UNLESS IT SHOULD INDICATE A LOSS OF MOMENTUM AND A WEAKENING OF SOMARE'S POSITION. GPNG HAS OTHER SERIOUS PROBLEMS, AS, FOR EXAMPLE, INFLATION (NOW AT THE TWENTY THREE PERCENT PER YEAR LEVEL) WHICH MAY IN TIME DWARF THE PRESENT CONTEST IN SIGNIFICANCE. OLMSTED UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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